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C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 001699

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL SP FR SY LE

SUBJECT: FRENCH ON PM DE VILLEPIN'S MARCH 13 WORKING VISIT  
TO SPAIN

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: According to the French MFA, counter-terrorism and energy policy were the two central topics of Prime Minister de Villepin's March 13 talks in Madrid with Spanish Prime Minister Zapateros. Prior to the ministerial, the French sent a strong message to the Spanish MFA on their dissatisfaction with FM Moratinos' recent visit to Damascus. END SUMMARY

¶2. (U) Poloff met with MFA Spain desk officer Julien Voiturier March 16 for a readout of Villepin's March 13 working visit to Madrid. As noted in the press, the two main issues for the visit were counter-terrorism -- especially with regard to ETA -- and energy policy. Voiturier noted that besides the working lunch, the meeting with advisers, and the press conference, the two prime ministers also conferred for about twenty minutes without other officials present.

¶3. (C) During a press conference with Zapatero, Villepin lauded Franco-Spanish cooperation in the fight against ETA, calling it exemplary and noting that it had "borne fruit" over the past several months. He refused to be drawn out on the question of whether the Spanish government should negotiate with ETA if the terrorist group were to renounce terror, saying that this was an internal issue for Spain.

¶4. (C) The press focused on recent French and Spanish "economic patriotism." Both leaders denied being protectionist, with Villepin calling for a European energy security policy. He cited Airbus as an example of European cooperation on a grand scale, and asked why Europe could not consider doing something on a similar level in the energy domain. The two also discussed problems hindering the installation of a high-tension electricity connection in the Pyrenees.

¶5. (C) Poloff asked whether the Prime Minister and Zapatero had discussed Spanish FM Moratinos' March 7 trip to Damascus. Voiturier said he did not know whether the subject had been broached during their one-on-one meeting, but noted that, in the run-up to the ministerial, the French Embassy in Madrid had passed a strong message to the MFA discouraging separate approaches to Damascus, noting that UNSYG Special Envoy for UNSCR 1559 Terje Roed-Larsen is the sole interlocutor for the Syrians. The Spanish responded that 1) the visit had been brief, 2) there had been no press involved, and 3) Moratinos had been motivated by his prior friendship with FM Mouallem.

¶6. (U) The MFA is now planning for the state visit of King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofia, March 27 through 29, their first to France in nearly 20 years.

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Stapleton